



OF BEES & HONEY

WINTER 2011 NEWSLETTER

A FEW WORDS FROM THE HONEY BEAR...

Hello dear friends, customers and fellow honey fiends.

The seasons seems to come and go at an alarming rate, with already bitter cold (and glorious blue sky's) blowing through the Highveld.

At the same time, it also brings to an end the 2010/11 honey season with all the good rains for the last two years. No wonder beekeepers in general have had a relatively prosperous time.

The "floods" must have vastly improved the water table almost everywhere, which means that at least for one year ahead the vegetation should also stay seriously happy and exuberant.

It also seems that the local beekeepers were right all along in their belief that the African Bees have an innate ability to overcome the various diseases that easily overwhelm their over civilised and decadent European cousins.

Two very good indications of their prowess were the local "non-events" of the horribly dreaded Varroa and the American Foul Brood (AFB) pandemic.

The first virtually eliminated almost every single non-treated swarm in the Northern Hemisphere, while in here it actually didn't even raise a whimper...

The discovery of the AFB in some Cape apiaries did bring some fairly generalised fear and even almost palpable panic to the beekeeping community, especially in that Province, as it should be expected.

Somehow it didn't take long for the glaring doom laden news headlines on the subject to gradually become less until they vanished completely, as if they were never there in the first place.

But that's a completely different story with the Capensis "pseudo clones"

problem on the Highveld ...

Our scutellatta, or African yellow bees seem to not be able to find an answer to those parasitic and even quite freakish relations of theirs.

If those weirdoes' abilities to fully mimic the native queens pheromones wasn't already bad enough, try to imagine any worker bee being able to lay "fertilised" eggs to their hearts content. Somehow this seems to completely puzzle our Highveld bees.

If it isn't already horrendous enough, try to imagine the sudden and total takeover of a well-organised and very successful hive by an anarchic and fully parasitic mob of smaller black bees, which definitely will force total collapse of the hive in the space of a few weeks.

While this cataclysmic "Clash of Civilizations" is going on day in and day out for some twenty odd years the Highveld beekeepers keep battling along in their most dignified stoic manner. This means having to regularly go through the heart wrenching ritual of cleaning out and replacing most of their hives with new occupants. Their fellow beekeepers in the Cape were daily clamouring about the "terminator" and even the "end of the world" AFB, which undoubtedly "would" bring complete ruin to not only them, but even the Continent.

Overall, these are indeed some quite shockingly contrasting reactions and general philosophies among members of these two crowds, you may agree...

If you were to ask reasons for such group differentia in one profession, in one country and generally from one people, I am afraid to say that I really can't fathom it.

Could it be the slightly different geography and climate that makes such impact?

For a long time quite a number of people kept asking and some demanding that I supplied it. For "it", I mean:

"FRESH ROYAL JELLY"

With acute embarrassment and obvious frustration, I kept mouthing some lame excuses as to why it couldn't be supplied. The main reason for this is no production of it was being done in this country and perhaps even on our Continent.

To produce such a "commodity" one requires huge amounts of spare time and patience, dedication and passion, but perhaps most importantly, a "market" large and sophisticated enough to appreciate such a rarity.

To remedy the non-availability, one could try sourcing it from overseas from reputable sources at very inflated prices. The other way was a lot more affordable, but perhaps not so desirable, as it would have a "made in China" sticker on it. If that wasn't already bad enough, it also had to be irradiated on arrival, which was equally a non-starter.

Right now, a couple of ethical beekeepers on the Highveld are frantically trying to stay afloat in the midst of the parasitic Cape bees' pandemic that is decimating their hives. They do it in a very conscious

way by raising their own queens, so that they do not drain the gene-pool of the wild swarm population, as has been done for so long.

There is a very good chance that the enormous energy and time consuming quest by these beekeepers to produce such a wonder by-product, will hopefully soon deliver to many the long sought after local product.

But first - **WHAT IS ROYAL JELLY?**

Let me start by saying that queen bees are made, not born, as every single female in a hive, including the queen, start from similar (fertilised) eggs.

I should mention that the other hive residents, the male "drones", come from purposefully laid unfertilised eggs. Somehow such reality could perhaps not be seen as all that dignified for the human species' male egos...

The sole reason for the randomly chosen one day old bee larva to become a 60% bigger bee than her sisters in just 19 days in African (21 in European) bees, plus all the other attributes that go with the most



... ROYAL JELLY

important function in the hive, has to do with the fact that queen bees live exclusively on royal jelly.

The consumption of this food from birth to death is not only the single reason for their incredible size, but also for their longevity; from four to six years, while the average worker lives for just six weeks (in summer).

One of the queens' main functions is that while still absolutely mobile, including full flying capability, it is that they are a most extraordinary egg-laying machine, with queen bees able to produce some 2,000 eggs per day on average. This equals two and a half times their own body weight.

Royal Jelly is secreted from the glands in the hypo pharynx of worker bees and fed to all young larvae in the colony, but with the worker and the drones only supplied with it for the first couple of days and in much smaller quantities.

When worker bees decide to make a new queen, which happens when the old one is weakening or is killed and the swarm is split in two, they choose several larvae as young as possible and feed them with copious amounts of royal jelly in specially constructed queen cells. This type of feeding triggers the development of queen morphology, including the fully developed ovaries needed to lay eggs.

Two queen cells with larva at different stages of development floating in Royal jelly. (Wikipedia photo)



COMPOSITION OF ROYAL JELLY

Research studies show that Fresh Royal Jelly in its activated state is a treasure house of B vitamins: B1, B2, B3, B6, B12, biotin, folic acid and the vitamin B-like substance, inositol. It is a major natural source of pantothenic acid and acetylcholine. The natural jelly contains vitamins A, C, D, E and 7 minerals, 18 amino acids, fatty acids, enzymes, hormones and 10 hydroxy-delta 2-decenoic acids, and in addition has antibacterial and antibiotic components.

MEDICINAL USES

ROYAL JELLY has been reported as a possible immune-modulatory agent in Graves' disease (autoimmune disorder that leads to over-activity of the thyroid). It has also been reported to stimulate the growth of glial cells and neural stem cells in the brain. To date, there is preliminary evidence that it may have some cholesterol-lowering, anti-inflammatory, wound-healing, and antibiotic effects. Research also suggests that the 10-Hydroxy-2-decenoic acid (10-HDA) found in royal jelly may inhibit the vascularization of tumours. Royal jelly has also been hypothesized to correct cholesterol level imbalances due to nicotine consumption.

ROYAL JELLY is often recommended for patients who have hormonal imbalances, including going through menopause and are feeling a general malaise. It compensates for vitamin and mineral deficiencies, increases energy and helps fight hot flashes.

CRACKS in the corners of the mouth, dry, scaly skin on the face and eczema on the hands are the results of a lack of vitamin B in the diet. In these instances, regular use of royal jelly is recommended for a period of four to six weeks.

MANY injuries and illnesses weaken muscles and decrease joint flexibility. Fortunately, royal jelly can help promote the intake of oxygen by the muscles as well as supply necessary vitamins and minerals.

EXTRA TIP: Natural royal jelly tastes somewhat sour and slightly bitter. It should be allowed to melt on the tongue or can be mixed with honey and added to cereal. It is recommended for children who suffer from loss of appetite or for seniors to strengthen their immune systems

ROYAL JELLY can also be found in some beauty products for its skin rejuvenations properties.

BEEKEEPERS "WANTED"

Is there a way that one can get in contact with the seemingly rare "complete" beekeeper in SA? How can it be established where they stay in the vastness of our country?

Most probably members of this "type" can portray quite well the accepted image of the usual (grumpy) loner that is totally committed and even passionate to his or her charges and metier. In most instances and perhaps due to this outsider frame of mind, they do not commonly want or desire to belong to associations or social groupings, which overall does not make it all that easy to find them.

At the same time, these (eccentric?) apiarists must not only be highly ethical as persons and professionals, but also be enormously motivated. Perhaps the right term is "driven" and to the point of perhaps resembling their bees in their "workaholic" behaviour and industriousness.

Quite a number of these beekeepers seem to also have inquiring minds, which perhaps could be labelled as suffering from some form of "compulsive curiosity".

This curiosity, drive & ethos usually manifests in various ways. From the vast empirical knowledge of their profession, including the local flora, to having an acute practical engineer's mind, so to be able to design, adapt and in some instances even build fairly complicated honey extracting machinery.

As a matter of principle and ethics, these people would invariably produce superb natural honey that they harvest from every possible honey plant in their foraging areas, including both indigenous, exotic and crop plant varieties, regardless of their rareness and/or non-commercialise.

Just to name a few; people like Hans S, which in one good season should be able to harvest great Aloe, Orange/Citrus, Bush willow-Combretum, mixed Wild Flora, Dandelion, Camaldulensis and Sideroxylon Bluegum, Sunflower and Cosmos honey.

Hennie T most probably will gather outstanding Acacia Mellifera, Blue Bush-Diospyros lycioides, Blue bells, Mesquite- Prosopis, Buffalo Thorn, Camaldulensis, Melliodora and Sideroxylon Bluegum and Sunflower honey.

Hans "Engineer" G, with his superb and very rare "northern" Aloe, Boekenhout, A Karroo, A Ataxacantha and Wild florals.

On top of that, they must also have the personal pride, forward vision and civil conciseness, so that if major and/or epoch making events like the present Honey Research were to happen in their life time, those beekeepers would immediately see what it meant not only for themselves, their industry and the country as a whole, but would make sure that it was a great success.

In the end and in a philosophical sense, it boils down to a question of personal self-esteem and ethos. In actual fact, does any individual narrow existence boil down to the little (or not so little) commercial value that can be mustered from and/or around his or her odd hive number? Isn't there more to life?

Please let me know if you know of, or ideally if you have the contacts for similar fellow beekeepers as the ones above, so that the widest possible range of SA honey can be sourced and sent for scientific analysis.



FEEDBACK

Feedback on the contents of this newsletter are welcome.

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